BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Lucille Maloney

There weren't many people here [CHA3, Civilian Housing Area 3] that had small children then. Even Dorothy Preddy, her oldest girl was a baby, and she kept having babies, see. And there were Negro fellows married to local women, but no Haole people. There wasn't any mixing there. Then down at the end of where we lived, those two, three streets, there's a great big, barracks-like building, and that was where all the Negro single men lived. And they had one beauty shop in a wooden building. And of course at that time, if you worked as a civilian employee for the government, you could shop at the commissary. But, they soon stopped that. So they had no privileges after that.

Lucille Maloney, daughter of Eleanor and Washington Fanning, was born in Georgetown, Kentucky. Her parents operated a dry goods store in Louisville, Kentucky until the family moved to Detroit.

She spent her childhood in Detroit. She graduated from Northwestern High School and completed a post-graduate course in business at Cass High School.

Maloney held a number of secretarial positions. After retiring as a secretary at Pearl Harbor, she also worked for OSHA and the University of Hawai'i.

She is a member of Wai Wai Nui.

Tape No. 18-9-1-88

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Lucille Maloney (LM)

June 3, 1988

Honolulu, Hawai'i

BY: Kathryn Takara (KT)

KT: This is Kathryn Takara interviewing Lucille Maloney on May 25, 1988 [in] Honolulu, Hawai'i.

Lucille, the last time we were talking about your past on the way up to your present, and I'd like to go back to some of the events in your early days. You said you were born---where were you born?

LM: Georgetown in Kentucky.

KT: Georgetown in Kentucky. And this was in the early part of this century?

LM: Mm hmm.

KT: You don't want to discuss it?

LM: Mm mmm. (Chuckles)

KT: And you grew up in Louisville, [Kentucky], was that correct?

LM: No, just four years, and then we moved to Detroit. See, there's a man who had the orchestra--I thought of his name Leroy Smith--sent for my father to move to Detroit, and that's why we moved there. And then after we got there, then Leroy Smith moved to New York. And my father refused to go.

KT: How many people were in your family at that time?

LM: Just the three of us.

KT: Your mother [Eleanor Bailey Fanning]. . .

LM: My father [Washington Fanning], myself.

KT: And then do you have any recollections at all of Louisville before you left, any at all? Do you remember anything at all?

LM: Mm hmm, yes.

KT: Can you tell us a little bit about Louisville.

LM: My mother took in a girl to take care of me. She just looked after me, that was all. Because I know I used to---someone that used to know my mother used to come by in the morning and take me to school. But sometimes she didn't dress me and I would take a little chair outside of the store--we had a store--and then she'd come by. She'd say, "Are you going to school?"

And I'd say, "Yes," and away I'd go. And my mother'd be furious.

And then the Episcopal church, we lived on a street called Walnut Street. At one time it was quite famous. And . . .

KT: Why was it famous?

LM: Because many of the Negroes lived down there, more or less. Their churches, their stores, and everything. So I remember twice on a Sunday, the church across the street burned, and then one Sunday it burned down. It was [an] Episcopal church. I remember telling my mother that the people in that church must be awful bad if the church burned down, you know. To me, everything was perfect when I come to church. And that's the most vivid things in my mind.

KT: Do you remember streetcars, or cars, or how did people get around, how did people communicate in those days . . .

LM: There were streetcars. We didn't have a car. Only thing I can say is we had this, what they called a dry goods store. And my father [had] as a hobby--well, he followed it more after we moved to Detroit--of cutting men's shirts. And he had a contract. My mother would sew them. (He made shoes too.)

KT: So your mother was a seamstress?

LM: Yes, she was supposed to have been a very fine seamstress.

KT: Did she design also?

LM: Uh huh [Yes].

KT: And who would she sew for?

LM: She only had two customers. That was in Detroit, [Michigan], just two. And they were both very, very wealthy. In fact, one was named Ford. But they weren't related to the [Henry] Fords. At that time, they had more money than the Fords. And they had a daughter, same age as I. And everything my mother made her, she made for me. Because my mother told them that she was a widow and that she was raising me by herself. And she passed [for White, crossed the color line] see. And she would never let them come (chuckles) to the

house. They'd drive her near the house [we rented from Italians], then she'd take the streetcar because she went to Grosse Pointe [Woods]. And in Grosse Pointe, they did [not] allow any Negroes (to live) out there.

KT: Not even if they were working?

LM: Just working, that's all. In fact, right till this day, Negroes don't live in Grosse Pointe.

KT: Grosse Pointe, what is this?

LM: Grosse Pointe, Michigan is where, that's where Henry Ford III lived. And they [Whites] just own it all out there, so they'd never let Black people move out there. That's about the only place in Detroit that they---see it's just like going across the street, but very exclusive.

KT: So you say your mother "passed." For those people that don't know what that means, perhaps you can share a little bit about her background, her grandparents, her parents, anything that you might know, so that the reader could understand what that means.

LM: Well, in order for her to keep this job with these people, she passed herself off as White, see. And all they knew [was] that she had a daughter that she was raising by herself. And they used to send me---there used to be a child's book of. . . . No, it was a magazine. They called it St. Nicholas Magazine. It was strictly for children, and so every Christmas they used to send me a subscription to it. And that's about all I remember about that. Up until the time I was twelve years old, we lived in a mixed neighborhood. And so all my playmates and friends were all White. So the minute I got to be twelve years old, why, she sent me to the Episcopal church, the Black Episcopal church so I would have more contacts. Because before they had parties, it would be all the White kids in the neighborhood, so she didn't think it was too good an idea as I grew older. And that's when I started to go into the Episcopal church.

KT: And no one ever called you names or anything in the mixed neighborhood that you lived in?

LM: Not that I can remember. Why, I don't know, but that. . . . See, I was the only one. Now I have found back in those days, in fact, when I worked for the government in Detroit, that as long as I was by myself in the office, I worked in the bank building, all the White people were very, very friendly. But when they started hiring the Black people, and they would see me talking to them, they would avoid me.

KT: Do you think that was because they didn't associate you with being Black, maybe they thought you were some other ethnic group . . .

LM: I don't think so. I don't think so. Because I used to---even I had gone to Jewish homes on Friday, you know, where they have that--I don't know, I forget what that is, you know. But anyways, it's some kind of religious day [the Sabbath] . . .

KT: Observation, uh huh . . .

LM: And then, when I was small, my mother sent me to kindergarten, I think. But it was Catholic. There were all Italian kids going there. So she took me out because she claimed she couldn't understand me when I got home from the school. So she took me out. But I admit, I can't---I do know that if something ever happened in school, my mother would go lickety-split to the school. But as to actually remembering that, I don't remember. Because even on Halloween, we'd all get together and go out, you know. So, and then when I got friendly with the Negro children, it was just a transition, it was real easy, you know. And we'd have our little clubs and like that.

KT: And then you would have to---would you have to go to another neighborhood to play with them or. . . .

LM: Yes. Well, see, we finally moved [bought a house]. And we moved into a neighborhood that there were Black people. They weren't right--all of them weren't right next door [25th Street] but they were throughout that neighborhood. And that's where I got to meet others, too . . .

KT: Was it a nice neighborhood?

LM: It was at that time. It was very, very nice. Because nearly all the people there, there were---I think there was one apartment, but they were all homes. See, they were all family people.

KT: In terms of work available for Black people and on the city in Detroit, say when you graduated from high school. What year, when did you graduate from high school?

LM: I don't remember the year now.

KT: What was the name of the school? You did remember . . .

LM: Northwestern High School.

KT: Northwestern, right. When you graduated from Northwestern, did you begin to work immediately then?

LM: No, I wanted to go to Ypsilanti, [Michigan], to teacher's college. And something happened in our family and my mother encouraged me to take a business course. So then I went to (Cass) High School. And they had just this postgraduate course, which I went the entire year. And I took nothing but shorthand, journalism, and typing. That's all I did for the entire year. And in the meantime, I think

it was Foster Washington, that I mentioned to you before. Anyway, there was no such a thing in Detroit then as a Black secretary.

KT: There was no such thing as a Black secretary?

LM: No, no. There just was not. I was the only one that they knew was in school. So they called me and asked me would I go to work, because I was almost ready to graduate from the postgraduate and to graduate with honors. So they let me go before this term was over and that's the way I went to work [as a secretary] for them [interracial commission]. Of course, it was temporary. I think it was nine months, something like that. It was a survey of the city as to how the police department was treating Black people. And they found that the police department was real bad. And where they would arrest a pregnant woman and kick her in the paddy wagon, you know. Now all those records is now everything, I understand, are in Wayne University. Because, we had policewomen. And we had several people from the University of Michigan, and they all worked on this survey. It was very interesting. That was my first job.

KT: Why was there a feeling that the police department, how the treatment of police needed to be investigated. There had been reports or . . .

LM: I think so because this was called a (interracial) survey. I don't remember too much about that. And when I first got the job, (I) went to be interviewed by Mr. Washington, I just went to pieces. And he said he was going to hire me at a certain salary anyway because he couldn't find anyone else. And so because our business college in Detroit, they would not accept Negroes.

KT: Any White business college would not accept . . .

LM: No, mm mmm.

KT: . . . any business college would not accept . . .

LM: No, not . . .

KT: . . . there was no place for Blacks to become trained for them.

LM: No.

KT: How many Blacks were there that had their own businesses?

LM: Mostly beauty shops.

KT: And there was no need for a secretary in a small . . .

LM: No. And then I worked for some attorneys. But there I was just a show thing. I was just a receptionist. The other girl did the work. But it's very interesting that she was the one that did most the work and then she went on to Chicago and took a course. And I

think she took a teaching. . . . I'm going to cut this real short, but just to show you how it is. You remember when the plane went down going to Korea? [LM is probably referring to Korean Air Lines Flight #007, shot down by the Soviet military in 1983.]

KT: Yes.

LM: Well, she was on that plane. At that time in Detroit she was a judge. But she, Jessie [Slater]--well, I called her Pharr all the time--but she and I worked together and she was lost in (the plane) too. And they gave her quite a bit of credit for trying because she was judge. She was judge of the traffic court. Mm hmm. But just see how things worked out that way that she and I . . .

KT: Started together.

LM: And when I worked with her she couldn't stand me. She tried her best to get me to quit. She did.

KT: This was a Black attorney that you were working for?

LM: Yes. They were all brilliant. But they were all alcoholics.

KT: Why do you think that? Why do you think that they would have been alcoholics?

LM: Because they wanted to live the fast life and they had mistresses and so forth. See, they had chauffeur. They just played most of the time to be perfectly frank with you. It's when I was---I had no confidence in attorneys from then on because. . . . I know there was one woman she was getting a divorce from her husband who was a dentist. And she would come in for consultation like this afternoon. As soon as she left, her husband would come in. See, and they'd tell him everything that occurred. And from then on, I soured on attorneys. (Chuckles) Oh, they were lousy (but brilliant).

KT: I'm trying to get a flavor of the Black community there on a whole, can you tell me a little bit on the whole? I guess there were a lot of migrant workers or people that came from the South, as well as professional people. Can you talk a little bit about people either that you knew or people that you heard about in terms of the types of lives, or types of jobs, or types of salaries, and how you would compare that with, say, a White person at the same time period.

LM: (LM sighs.) Well, let's see. There were only two places downtown Detroit. There was a big department store there called J.L. Hudson. Now they're the only ones downtown that hired Black people. And they hired them as elevator operators, the men as starters. Behind there was a fur company. And this man is the only one downtown other than Hudson's that hired Black women. But they had to be good-looking. They HAD to be good-looking.

KT: And good-looking, did that have do with skin color as well as . . .

LM: Most of them, yeah. Most of them. Because I worked there (chuckles), and I knew, see. He was good . . .

KT: What was that saying you said to me?

LM: Beg your pardon?

KT: About light and right and . . .

LM: (White), light or bright is right.

KT: Mm hmm.

LM: And there was one woman that she was bright enough that he could put her on the floor to sell. And he was good to the workers. He would give them bonuses. And the woman who gave us our paychecks, (was a Negro and) she was the bookkeeper for all pay. And she held that job for years. But those two stores were the only ones downtown. The biggest one to hire was Ford Motor Company, but at one time they had to buy their job.

KT: What do you mean, "buy their job"?

LM: Well, I forget his name now, but he was one of the men they put in there. And you had to go---men had to go by him to get the job there, and then pay him money. In fact, my girlfriend's mother, she got jobs for people, Black people, out at a place which is like a--I call [it] an asylum. [They would be] very mediocre jobs, but they had to pay her to get the jobs. And there was really no jobs in Detroit too much for the Black people. Finally, one woman opened the business college so they could go to it. I was very fortunate to get mine like I did. And---but really, the people didn't get the jobs until the wartime [World War II]. And they brought the Black and the White from the South. And that's what caused our race riot.

KT: Oh. What was this? When did that occur?

LM: Well, first one was, I think, 1943, but it was either '43 or '44, I'm not sure. [In 1943, 25 Blacks and 9 Whites were killed in rioting that was sparked by an altercation involving a White man and a Black youth at Belle Isle Amusement Park. Source: The Encyclopedia of Black America (1981)] And it happened on a Sunday. And it happened---we had a place in Detroit called Belle Isle and it's a great, great, big park. And you have to go over a bridge to get to it. It's over the Detroit River. So somehow or another, a fight occurred between the White and Black. And it had started on a Sunday and it continued all night long. I was out of town when it happened and I come back late at night. The next morning, someone called our house and said, "Whatever you do, don't go to work." Me, I lived in Detroit all my life, nobody's going to stop me from going to work. So I did. And catching the bus downtown, we would pass

down the street and automobiles would be just turned up. Our concrete curbings--I don't mean small one, big ones--were just broken up. And so, I worked all day. I went out at lunch. And I just walked across the street, and in the big department stores they were throwing stink bombs. Because they would get in there, see. And the riot squad would pull up and then sit there, they wouldn't do anything. So finally, when I got ready to go home, I called a friend of mine to pick me up. And the police lieutenant took me downstairs because they [Whites] were stopping streetcars, streetcars running down the main street, Woodward Avenue. And they'd stop the streetcar and any Black people on there, they'd pull them off of the streetcar and beat them up. Oh it was terrible, but I understand the other one was worst. But, (the Blacks) were really after the Jewish people, too, because they felt they had taken their money, you know. And that was down through Hastings Street (called the East Side).

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

KT: We'll start again now the phone rang.

LM: And, well anyway, this police lieutenant took me down. I got to my friend's car and we had to go in a different neighborhood to get me home. And that night, the militia come in. And the Reverend [Horace] White, he went through the areas and told---in fact, we had martial law that night. And then it quiet(ed) down, but since (I have) been gone (from Detroit), they've had a terrible (riot). They burned (many) place. Those places are still terrible. But you (have) to go through those neighborhoods where the houses are (still) boarded up.

KT: Well, if there were no jobs for Black people, what did they do? Like they did--there was no significant community until the wartime. Were there Black people there before the war [World War II]?

LM: Oh yes, but we had schoolteachers there. But, work was not easy at all. And then what they got paid for was nothing, absolutely nothing. That's all I can remember because I was always looking for some kind of job, you know. And then, living home, if I didn't like the job, I didn't take it. But it was hard for the people because I went to, let's see, the agricultural department in the government. And what they did during the war and before the war, they'd send you telegrams [regarding job opportunities], see. Of course, they didn't know what color you were. And I was on the list, having passed the exams. So I went to this one fellow and he interviewed me and he told me very frankly that if I had been Assyrian, had said I was Assyrian, anything but Negro, he could have hired me. He said because. . . . He very frankly told me that. Well then, we had a Black judge then. I think he was from the islands [West Indies]. And I went to him and told him the story. And he said there was nothing he could do about it because, naturally, I did know they can take anybody out of the [top] three people [who took the exam]. Or if they don't want to hire anybody, they don't have to out of those

three. Now, when I went to Wayne County, I worked for [the department that registers deeds]. I was highest on the list. I took the exam. They never called me. Never called me. Well, my girlfriend's, I lived with (she) and her mother--and she was one of these Virginia [girls that] looked like White people, see, and she sat on the board [Board of Directors] for the county. So she called the treasurer and raised the devil with him. I think it was a Wednesday because they had not appointed me (yet). And on a Friday, they called me to come to work, which I did. But that department that I was in---Polish people hate Negroes. They just hate them.

KT: Why? Why do you think?

LM: I don't know. I think it's because they're immigrants. So the head of the department where I worked in the county--the pay was very good--and they gave me a bad time. I worked. . . . But I had a girlfriend in (the County Building as a deputy) and she was older than I. And she would just tell me, "Play it cool. Don't say a word," see. They would put nasty [notes]--on Saturday was the skeleton crew and I worked every other Saturday. The Saturday that I didn't work they would put awful nasty notes in my desk drawer. And when I would go on Monday morning, I'd find them. I'd call her because I was so upset. And she said, "Don't say a word." So, just to show you I didn't say (a word). But when I quit, I was coming here. And, they would come to me and say, "You're the best we've ever had to work here." That was when I was quitting. But I had to go to the head of the commission to quit, you see. They made it hard going in and coming out. So he told me that he'd see that I would never get another job in Detroit. And I told him, because I was kind of sassy then, I told him, "Well, I don't care." I said, "Because I won't be here. I'm going to Hawai'i." So he didn't say no more to me. But he couldn't have kept me from other job(s) in Detroit. But I could see, like we have a lot of people I do believe that come out of A&M, is that in Florida?

KT: Yes, [Florida] A&M [University].

LM: Yes. And moved to Detroit. Now they (are) the ones that really broke the ice and fought. Because the old Detroiters to me, sat back on their haunches and did nothing, because we had one family that owned a square block, owned that square block. It's like it's still there with a theater there. And through family, and divorces, and everything, they lost that whole thing. And you see a lot of them were the first families of Detroit that . . .

KT: These were Black people?

LM: Beg your pardon?

KT: Black people?

LM: Yes [Black people]. I remember one time my girlfriends, she looked just like an Indian and they had a [girl's] club. And they were

having a little party in the (home of a member). . . . One of the young fellows asked my girlfriend to go, but she didn't belong to the club. And when she went where the party was (held), this girl's mother [who was holding the party] met her at the door and told her she couldn't come in. Can you imagine that, fourteen or fifteen years old?

KT: And why did she say that she couldn't come in?

LM: Because she wasn't of the same group as the party and she didn't belong to the club. The boy could take anyone [he] wanted. They could be that cruel there. That society, that Black society. But I liked Detroit even though I'm away from there now because to me it's home, you see.

Should I tell you anything more now (chuckles)?

KT: Yes. In terms of Black businesses aside from beauty shops, what other types of Black businesses did you remember being in Detroit?

LM: Well, they had real estate men as. . . . And my father for a hobby had a shoe repair shop. And then this was before things were booming. There was a preacher from New Orleans that lived in Detroit and he brought this bank building. He had a real estate business and he would speculate. See he would speculate and half the time he didn't have the money that he should, but he was shrewd. And he did very well with that. I know there were a lot of doctors and there were a lot of attorneys, but as for your businesses, I don't remember too much, except beauty shops. But you know, [un]like today there were no dress shops and things like that.

KT: Why do you think that is?

LM: In that day, they hadn't progressed that far. There was no way they could get them.

KT: Because the banks would not loan them money, perhaps, or . . .

LM: Oh, I wasn't old enough to know what happened. But you see, nearly all the businesses, as in any large city, was run by Jewish people. See, those were the stores they destroyed during the race riot, were the Jewish people's stores. And they just wiped out neighborhoods. I mean, the Black people. Excuse me.

KT: Wait, I don't understand. The Black people wiped out other people's neighborhoods or other people wiped out the Black neighborhoods?

LM: No, the Black people did that to the Jewish people. Oh, and churches. Please don't forget the churches. Yes, there were churches on every corner, of course. The most prominent church was the Second Baptist Church. And then they had the church on the west side that was run by Aretha Franklin's father. So, to me, that's all I can remember, you know.

KT: Maybe you can speak a little bit as to what the churches gave to the community. How did the churches fit into the community?

LM: They took from the community, I'm afraid, because everybody was trying to buy a church or build a church. Because I remember one time I was in Chicago and we were staying across from a church. And the lady where we were staying told us to watch the church. You know how many people went there. She said how nearly all the congregation were people that worked in "service." And that on Sunday, they go to church and give all their money to church. Well, I've heard that since, too. I never went particularly to a church like that in Detroit. I used to go to Catholic church a lot. And then after I went to. . . . Episcopal church, names skipped my mind. Of course, we had the Y's, too, there, but they were all segregated, of course, at that time.

KT: The Y's? You mean the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association], the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]?

LM: Yes. But as (to) the bus drivers, streetcar men, I don't remember anything like that. I guess we would have been astounded if we did see one (chuckles), you know. And like you see the kids working in the grocery stores here? Nothing like that. I don't even remember any Black people having like mama-san stores, I don't remember that unless we didn't live in the neighborhood where they were.

KT: So would you say that the attitude was happy or sad or depressed? What kind of attitude did the Black people have before the war?

LM: Well, you see, I just don't remember because we did like we wanted to do. Oh yes, John Roxborough and some of them [also the manager of Joe Louis], they did own a hotel, a real big hotel. And that was---they got there before wartime. But it really boomed during the wartime. And . . .

KT: This was for all Black women?

LM: That's all that went there, yeah. It was across from the hospital, and they had a Black hospital. And you know what we think about Black hospitals? Well, that was. . . . Oh, you don't? Oh, well, we think of them as slaughterhouses, you know. Because I was in one once and I went in the---they didn't have, like hospitals, didn't have a bathroom in your room. You had to use the community one. And I went in it one day and there was this girl's got all places on her face, you know.

KT: Like bumps, like what?

LM: No, like syphilis.

KT: Oh, no.

LM: Like this (LM points to face), you know. And I had to see them.

And so the doctors come running to me and told me that it was arrested. But can you imagine saying. . . . And that is the only time I've been in a Black hospital and if I can I'll never go again. Of course, I imagine, we can't judge, he [Dr. Thomas] was the only one in Detroit that could afford one. So naturally, he wanted that money, and then something out to the---any poor people he [supposedly] got a $1,000 a month for [indigents] if he took them in the hospital. And therefore, they didn't have to send them to the White hospitals.

But my childhood was, yes, I was happy, carefree. I was always looking for something to make money. (Chuckles) Like I made these fudge, yeah, fudge in a muffin tin? And took it to school and sold it. Then they stopped me for sanitary reasons, you know. But I never thought of that. But they stopped me from doing it.

KT: Were the schools integrated?

LM: Yes. That's why I'm so surprised, you know. I've had several of my friends here get real uptight with me because I've said something about White in the schools. (They said), "Why you (are) silly, you know the schools weren't mixed."

I said, "No, I don't know it. Because I wasn't raised in the South." No, they were all mixed schools, but if there was, say, like where Joe Louis lived in Detroit, there was a lot of Black people. It's what we call, "Black Bottom," and that's where he lived. Well, naturally, that school had nothing but Black people in it, Black kids. But this guy--I'm getting off the subject, but I don't know whether you saw this guy on TV that had all these wives down in Carolina--that is hilarious. They dress like Africans, you know, and all that. The women are beautiful. There are all these wives. So, Oprah asked him . . .

KT: Oprah Winfrey?

LM: Yes. She asked him where was he born and where he was from, and before he said it, I knew he was going to say Detroit. So he said, "Black Bottom of Detroit." I knew it because he . . .

KT: Why'd they call it "Black Bottom"?

LM: I don't know why they did. I really don't. It was just loaded with Black people. Maybe that's why, (and not the best class of people).

KT: Was it at the bottom of a hill?

LM: No, no, no. It was just an area. And then we had a big recreation center there, you know, where they try. In fact, that's where Joe Louis got his start in going to the Golden Gloves. Because that was quite prominent there. But quite a few Blacks worked in the county building. That was the in-job if you could get in the county building. But you had to know somebody who knew somebody at one

time, and they had that [patronage] system--what do they call it, I forget now, but anyway, you didn't take a civil service, it was who you knew. But they cut that out. Mm hmm.

KT: What about housing then? Could you buy a house wherever you wanted to, more or less?

LM: No, no.

KT: How did it work?

LM: I don't know. I find that Negroes are drawn to each other. If I know somebody is living in a house over there, then I'm going to look for a house over there, too. And that's the impression. Now since then, it has changed. They have money. There's an awful lot of money in Detroit. And they have moved out in, I can't think of it, but they're called some kind of "woods" [Bloomfield Hills], and they're gorgeous places. And there is a lot of people that have their boats, you know, that go up and down the Detroit River. It's a lot of money there, now. But they have made it on numbers? When I lived there it was the numbers. That was the business in those days.

KT: Was that legal? Was it legal?

LM: No.

KT: But it was a way that people could make money . . .

LM: Yes.

KT: . . . if the other doors were closed.

LM: Yes, they made a lot of money on numbers. John Roxborough, and any number of those prominent people. Now I understand it's the dope. They say that the people there have beautiful boats. Just beautiful. And they say that most of them are made that way. I don't know. But anyway, in my day, it was the numbers. Yes. And they used to get robbed going to deliver (chuckles) the money. But as to streetcar and bus drivers, no, uh uh.

KT: What about in terms of, were you in Detroit when there was prohibition and did it matter or. . . . What about . . .

LM: (I was there and we had rum runners, but only the Whites, and called them the Purple gang. I only heard that as I was in school.)

KT: And then. . . . What other area did I want to talk about . . .

LM: Now, they used to have house rent parties.

KT: And what are those?

LM: (Chuckles) Well, I say when the Wai Wai Nui [a Black women's club] has a soul food dinner in somebody's house, I call it, "A house rent party." They get mad at me. House rent party is the people come in and gamble. And then they fix meals. And they sell the meals to them. And see, during real bad times, that's the way people paid their rent. Was that way and that was done in Chicago, too, but it was done in Detroit. But of course . . .

KT: House rent parties?

LM: Yes, that's what I call them, house rent parties.

KT: And what about the entertainment world? In terms of jazz, or blues, or music, or clubs?

LM: Well, you see I left there before Motown. Motown now, oh, it just rules there. And in fact, most of our artists have come out of Detroit. Most of them. I remember they had a ballroom in Detroit on Woodward Avenue. That was the place for people. And they would bring the bands there. And the Black people would go there, too. But, they'd go there to dance, you know, and everything. We had the amusement parks, but you could see just like wartime when they had that big riot on Belle Isle. Belle Isle's a beautiful place. But when you think of how large it is and how many, many people can--they're going to have clashes there. And it's free to go on there. So.

KT: Well, let's move on a bit and then you could tell me how you got over to Hawai'i. What brought you over here and. . . .

LM: I had been married and I was separated. And for some reason or another my husband landed here. So, he wrote to me in Detroit and asked me how would I like to come here. So, I thought about it, but I was coming on my own. So I wrote to Washington. And I was transferred and I got my transfer papers and I decided not to come. So, I sent them back to Washington and said I had property to settle, and at another time I would consider it. So little while after I said that (I would go), and they sent them to me special delivery. So I still played around. And one night, I stayed up nearly all night playing poker. And one of the girls come in, something was said. I said, "Oh, shoot, I'm going to Hawai'i." So, I got the train (two days later). Oh, they come for my trunk and I didn't have it packed right. So they said they'd have to come back for it. So they did, the next day. So I got the train from Detroit to Chicago. But I had made no reservations to California. So, they said, "This is going to be---you're taking a chance."

So I said, "Okay." And it so happened I got a berth from Chicago to Salt Lake. And fortunately, somebody got off in Salt Lake. So I got on. And then I stayed six weeks in California, Vallejo. And finally, I got here.

KT: What did you do in Vallejo?

LM: Nothing. I could have gone to work, but I decided I didn't want to work. We stayed in like a dormitory. And so I couldn't stand it because those---we were in a dormitory that was all Black women. And . . .

KT: In California?

LM: Yes, in Vallejo. Oh, Vallejo was very prejudiced. I went with a friend of mine to a cafe one day and we sat at the counter and the fellow behind the counter said, "I'll wait on you," talking about me, "but, I won't wait on her."

KT: Why?

LM: I don't know.

KT: Was she dark . . .

LM: (No, brown skin.)

KT: . . . and you were light?

LM: Uh huh. (Much lighter than now.)

KT: Isn't that something.

LM: Oh yes, California was very prejudiced then.

KT: This was in the '40s?

LM: Yes, yeah.

KT: Nineteen forty. . . . What was it?

LM: Five.

KT: Nineteen forty-five.

LM: Yes, uh huh. So I couldn't stand the dormitory because those women were just wild as they could be.

KT: What do you mean "wild"?

LM: They would have men come in, and the woman that I met there she was very rigid, so every day I took the bus and went to San Francisco or Oakland. And one day I was in San Francisco and I told them I wanted to go to the International House? I caught a cab, I wanted to see it. I got there and guess what it was? It was a strip place. It was all closed during the day. It was all strip joints. They called it the, "International Section." And I was so outdone, the cab driver laughed at me. I said, "I (was) sure." So, it was pretty bad in Vallejo. So then I'd come over here on a ship. In fact, I've been back and forth twelve times on (a) ship.

KT: Yes?

LM: Yeah. And I went to Japan on the ship, too. But anyway, I could have gone to work in the shipyard there, but I didn't want to go. So I didn't go. And there was one little fellow. I think he was crippled. He used to talk to me all the time. I wanted to show you how bad it was there. And then I didn't see him. And then I finally saw him. And I said, "What happened to you?"

Well, he had gone out with some woman that gave him a knockout drop. And they had taken all his clothes, his money, his watch, everything.

KT: They gave him a what?

LM: Knockout drink.

KT: A knockout?

LM: Yes.

KT: Oh, I see.

LM: And he was out two or three days. That's the kind of place it was, when I say that. . . . So I was kind of aloof because I didn't like anything like that.

KT: Were all these women coming to Hawai'i?

LM: Yes . . .

KT: They worked for the. . . .

LM: Well, they were either coming to join their husbands. A lot of them weren't working because they weren't qualified to work. So after I got here, well, I got a divorce. I don't know where my husband is now (chuckles), my ex-husband. But anyway, I (met) a real nice man when I first got here, when I went to Pearl Harbor in the office, and he'd come over. He would . . .

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 18-11-2-88

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Lucille Maloney (LM)

June 3, 1988

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Kathryn Takara (KT)

KT: This is June 3, 1988, and I am about to interview Lucille Maloney in Honolulu, Hawai'i and this is Kathryn Takara doing the interview.

Well, let's pick up in the experience in Vallejo and the crossover to Hawai'i, how you came and what you found when you got here.

LM: Well, in Vallejo, you know, it was very prejudiced there. Very, at that time. And so, nearly every day, I'd take the bus and go into San Francisco--Oakland. And that was just about it.

KT: Was it segregated there in Oakland or . . .

LM: No, they had signs every place. "We are permitted to refuse service."

KT: They have signs?

LM: That was all over. I was surprised because people had told me, you know California, oh, but the signs were every place.

KT: Were they also applicable to people of Asian descent, do you think, or was it only for Blacks, those signs?

LM: That, I don't know because I didn't see many Asians then.

KT: I guess they were all in the camps then. [Nineteen] forties . . .

LM: Well, I understand quite a few were in the camps. But I didn't see them. Is that too much air?

KT: No, no. So then, when you left Vallejo, tell me how it was to leave there and come to Hawai'i. Tell me about the ships that you came on.

LM: Well, it was---see, we had to stay there and wait. I waited there for six weeks before I boarded the ship. And the ship was okay, you know. It was not plush, by no means. It was all sailors on there.

And it was okay in the meals. I think we were five days on the--five or six days.

KT: Let me interrupt just for a minute there.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

LM: Yes, it was just an ordinary ship. And some of the fellows coming over, we used to sit and play cards and everything because there was nothing to do.

KT: Did you have a single room?

LM: No, I was with someone . . .

KT: Just one other person?

LM: Yes, uh huh. And let's see, see they shipped with me anything that I wanted to bring. I only brought a trunk, though, that's all. But they would bring anything you wanted.

KT: And then who met you when you got here?

LM: Well, I didn't know anybody here. I was married and my husband met me, and that's all I knew. I knew no one here. No one at all. And it was quite a while before I met people.

KT: So where did you live?

LM: Let's see, did I live in--they called it Naval Housing Area 2 [NHA 2]. I lived there because I separated from my husband. Where did we live? It must've been NHA2, though, because when I separated from him, I lived with the people right in there. And their names were the Wards, Solly Ward. And then, finally, he left here and went down under.

KT: Where is "down under"?

LM: Johnson Island, some place like that. They always said, "Down under."

KT: And you continued to live at NHA . . .

LM: Two. And then, they were going to move all of the people out of NHA2. In NHA2 was all Black people. And so they decided--some of the fellows decided--that they would refuse to move in CHA3 [Civilian Housing Area 3], in a [another] segregated area.

KT: NHA2 was not a segregated area?

LM: Yes, it was.

KT: But they did not want to move to another segregated area?

LM: Yes, uh huh. So then, but they kind of put Mr. [Solly] Ward, you know, as the leader. So, one Saturday morning, he got his wife up and me up early and we moved, just like that, into CHA3. So the people were very upset about that, the Black people. But there was nothing they could do about it. So I lived with them. She was pregnant, it was the first time she'd ever been pregnant. And I stayed there with them until I got my divorce. And then I started going with the fellow named Jack Neal. And he got with Casey, I believe? William Casey. And a fellow named--what was his name? Waller--I think his name was Waller. And with the help of a Japanese fellow, Kenneth Sano, they formed the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People].

KT: Oh. Osano, was that . . .

LM: Kenneth Sano, he was Japanese.

KT: Sano, S-A-N-O?

LM: Yes. And the reason he would not organize it was because he was Japanese. And he brought it to the fellows' attention, because there was a soldier up in Schofield they were going to hang [in about 1946].

KT: Hang? For what?

LM: Actually, I've forgotten now.

KT: Is that a customary form of punishment in those days?

LM: At that time. And so, he tried to get in touch with the Negro fellows to help save him and that's why they organized. And then they had a woman professor up at the university [University of Hawai'i] named Catherine Lackey. She was from the South, but she was very liberal. And she tried to help him and also . . .

KT: Was she Black?

LM: No. She was a Southerner. And then [also] the principal of Roosevelt High School.

KT: Roosevelt.

LM: Yes. And they had repercussions with their job. Catherine Lackey left here.

KT: Oh.

LM: Yeah, and I forget about what happened to the principal. So, anyway, they tried the best to keep the boy from being hung, but he was hung. And that's what developed the NAACP here.

KT: Very interesting.

LM: And I have one picture here I can show you. And then, oh, they had friction. Well, first Paul Robeson come here.

KT: Oh, Paul Robeson.

LM: Yes, and he had a concert here in McKinley High School. And some of the people in the NAACP, they all went to hear him. But they had a reception for him at Lau Yee Chai's. And of course, they got involved as being [in sympathy with Paul Robeson]. . . . Soon after that, it was the time of the [Hawai'i] Seven? [Hawai'i Seven refers to seven alleged Communists charged under the Smith Act of conspiring to teach the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. Their trial, the Smith Act trial, occurred in 1953.] Well, they were tainted as reds. There were seven--what's the attorney downtown, her husband--can't think of their names, now. Myer Symonds is one. Bouslog, Harriet Bouslog.

KT: How do you spell it?

LM: Bouslog? B-O-U-S-L-O-G. And Myer Symonds. And they were sympathetic with these seven people that were tried. They identified them as the [Hawai'i] Seven. And . . .

KT: Who were the seven that were tried? Were these Bouslog and . . .

LM: No, they were not in there. The only one I can remember now is the Japanese woman. She's made quite a name (for) herself in the unions, you know who I mean?

KT: Ah Quon McElrath?

LM: Yes, yeah. She was one of them. [A.Q. McElrath was not one of the Hawai'i Seven. LM had Aiko Reinecke in mind, but she is mistaken. John Reinecke was one of the Seven, but Aiko, his wife, was not indicted. Another Japanese woman, Eileen Fujimoto, was one of the Seven.] So then, the NAACP, we had a professor up at the university--somebody may tell you different but this is really true. They had an election of [William] Stacy and--I can't think of his name right now, but I will--Wideman, his name was Wideman. Lou Wideman [the spelling of this name has not been confirmed]. And they were both Negroes. And every time they'd have a vote they'd come out a tie. So finally, down the line, this professor up at the university, he was a Jewish man--I'll think of his name down the line--so he sent the charter back. In the meantime . . .

KT: He sent the charter back where?

LM: To New York.

KT: Because they couldn't make a decision on the leaders?

LM: Yes, in the meantime--what is White's name? Oh, Walter White. He come here to visit Nolle Smith. Nolle Smith explained to him we

didn't need an NAACP. And so Walter White decided that we didn't need it. That's before all of this happened. And then, Marva [Garrett], not Marva particularly, there was a sergeant who was influential in getting the charter back. And, they participated in, you know, when--I'm trying to think of the fellow who was assassinated before Martin Luther King. What is his . . .

KT: Kennedy?

LM: No, no, no. The Black man.

KT: Malcolm X?

LM: No, no, no. He had a brother, too. They went in his yard and assassinated him one day. Anyway . . .

KT: Medgar Evers?

LM: Yes. Well, we, the Wai Wai Nui Club--now I'm skipping around--the Wai Wai Nui Club had a benefit for Medgar Evers and the NAACP. We had it at the Princess Ka'iulani [Hotel]. And as a result of that, we were able to send money to Medgar Ever's widow and finish paying for our $500 membership in the NAACP.

And, oh, I'm back to CHA3, I'm sorry. The people, I can't tell you how long they lived there. Maybe two or three years in that area. Then all of a sudden, the Housing gave them eviction notices. Well, they panicked. I assure you of that. Because they had to get out. So some went to another housing area. Some got out and got their own places to live. And some bought places, but they had to get out. And that was the best thing that ever happened to break that up, because when I received my eviction notice, I immediately moved in town.

KT: Were there any Black people living in town besides Nolle Smith at the time?

LM: I believe so, because I think the Wildys lived (in town). I forget who it was now. . . . And there may have been more than that because you know how in Honolulu, you can kind of lose yourself.

KT: Were the conditions at CHA3 the same, just as good as the conditions in the rest of the housing, it just was that it was off in one area?

LM: I think so. You know, if you needed repairs, you could get that and so forth. I think so. It's just that, say, in this block, there's all Black people. Right across the street in the next block it's all White. That's why.

KT: And did people socialize together, the Blacks and the Whites?

LM: No, no.

KT: And the children, did they go to school together?

LM: I don't remember much of. . . . There weren't many people here that had small children then. Even Dorothy Preddy, her oldest girl was a baby, and she kept having babies, see. And there were Negro fellows married to local women, but no Haole people. There wasn't any mixing there. Then down at the end of where we lived, those two, three streets, there's a great big, barracks-like building, and there was where all the Negro single men lived. And they had one beauty shop in a wooden building. And, of course at that time, if you worked as a civilian employee for the government, you could shop at the commissary. But they soon stopped that. So they had no privileges after that. And of course . . .

KT: What year was this that they closed CHA3 [evicted civilians]?

LM: I'm trying to think now. . . . I think it was 1950 [1951].

KT: Mm hmm. That long?

LM: Yes.

KT: It was open for quite a while?

LM: Around 1950. I'm pretty sure because. . . . See, I arrived here October 1945. The war was over when I come. In the shipyard, the shipyard proper [Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard], at that time, there were only two Negro women that I knew--myself and Clarissa Wildy. We were only ones (in) the whole shipyard. And there were over 5,000 employees there, but there's plenty in there now, I understand. Now, what do you want me to tell . . .

KT: So then, yes, so then how much contact did you have with the local people here, Japanese, Hawaiian, Chinese, whatever.

LM: When I first come, I had a lot, when I first come. I went to luaus. When I went to work in the shipyard, they didn't like me. I guess I was kind of strange (chuckles) to them. And, I had a lot of contacts. In fact, I still have friends. Japanese, Haoles, I'm still friends with them.

KT: From way back in the '40s . . .

LM: Yes.

KT: . . . '50s . . .

LM: Mm hmm. Yes.

KT: . . . time period.

LM: I had them scattered all over the Mainland. I have a Haole friend in Arkansas. I have a Japanese friend in New York.

KT: And what did other non-White groups say about the treatment that Blacks had when they first got here? Did they have any comments as to the fact that the people were in separate housing or could or could not go in certain areas?

LM: Well, they could go (in) any area. But, I imagine, I never heard anything said about that and I imagine the people here just thought it was what it was supposed to be. Because you find the local people knew nothing about the way we [Blacks] lived. Because one day in the shipyard, one of the girls called me. She was in the files (and) I went to get something from her. And she was talking about Black people and she said something. And I said to her something about color. I think it was about my color. And I said, "Well, we got blondes, blue eyes, everything you can name in our race."

So she said, "Well, the only thing I know about a Negro is that they're real black and get real short hair." See, that was the extent of her knowledge. She didn't know any better. And I've found that was true with a lot of them. And if you looked a certain way, you just was not a Negro.

KT: They would think you were just. . . . What? Did they assume you were Polynesian or something?

LM: Yes, or Portuguese. When Bertha [Dunson] and I went to Hana together--of course, I'd been there before--but when she went with me, they just knew she was Portuguese. See, they were not schooled in that. Well, I can well appreciate that, because when I come here from Detroit, all my friends in Detroit thought I'd lost my mind. Because we knew nothing about Hawai'i, you see. So they thought I'd lost my mind.

KT: What did they think you would find here? What were your expectations here?

LM: I didn't know. And when I got to California, I called the navy department in San Francisco and told them I changed my mind (chuckles). I didn't want to go. So the officer told me, "Well, if you just go and turn around and come back, it'll be a wonderful experience." So, that was that. Of course, they weren't going to let me come back. I know that.

So I could never see. . . . The only thing that I saw of any, say, discrimination of any kind would be the Haole men in the shipyard who were supervisors. They were definitely, definitely that way. Not only with the Negroes. I had one man I worked with and a Japanese girl come in to apply for a stenographer's job. And so, after she left, he said to me, "I'm sorry, Lucille, but I can't hire her because she would take shorthand in pidgin."

I said, "The only way she'd take shorthand in pidgin is for you to talk it." But you see how prejudiced he was.

And so they were all---I was fortunate. When I first went in the shipyard, a Haole man come to me and ask me would I be his secretary. And I said, "I've got to think about it (chuckles)."

So (after) two weeks, finally he come back. He says, "You know, I've got to have your answer right now." So, he was a wonderful boss, but he was from New York, see. So, I never had any trouble at all. They would go to him--the local people in the shipyard after they found out I was Negro, they would go to him--because he told me--and ask him why did he pick out a Negro secretary. But other than that, I never had any trouble.

KT: What about the men, the Negro men? Did you find that they had any trouble in particular? Would you hear them talking story or hear any issues?

LM: Not particularly. They may have. Now, my husband then (James Neal) was the president of the NAACP. They might have taken it to him, but I don't know. But, like I say, it's the way the NAACP started, so. . . .

KT: And then once you moved into the community, what was it like to live in Honolulu during that time? I mean, was there this kind of traffic, were there telephones? I mean, what was. . . . Give me a little feeling of what it was like then.

LM: To me it was like a country town. (Chuckles) And, of course, I used to go every place by myself and I would get lost, because I was taking the buses and so forth. And Saturday and Sunday, that's what I did because I'm a tourist at heart, so. But I never had any trouble at all, not at all. Of course, it's so changed now. Like, we've had cases of discrimination, but I've never seen it, no place where I'd go to eat, you know, like the Hyatt Regency or any those places, no. I'm not aware of it. But, you know, Kay, it's a very subtle thing here, you see. And, I would say, if you're looking for it, you'll find it.

But other than that, I went to answer the ad for [an] apartment in Varsity Circle. It was owned by a Japanese man. So then, he called me--after he rented it to me now. He didn't ask for a deposit or anything. And he called me up. He said he didn't know, was I able to pay the rent? I said, "What?" So he asked me again. So I said, "I tell you what, if you want to find out anything about me, you call my boss." So I gave him the number, and I told my boss that he was going to call. He waited all day, and that man never called. So I called him up that night and bawled him out because he didn't call him. (Chuckles) And I lived there nine years, and when I left--it's one of those older places in Varsity Circle, only six apartments. And when I got ready to leave, he called all the tenants up to my apartment to show them how nicely I had left it. And, that was the only time I had any trouble.

I lived in Makiki. But, Mrs. Chun's son [landlady's son], he was

just a spoiled brat. And on Christmas day one year, I had a friend---oh, I was having company for dinner, when all of a sudden the Frigidaire door just come right off. And so I called him. I said, "You'd better get up here right away." Well, he gave me some lip, so then finally I called him back. I said, "You have somebody fix this, but don't you come." So he didn't come. He sent somebody else. But he was just a spoiled brat. Uh huh.

I haven't lived too many places. I moved from Spreckels [Street]. I rented from Japanese there. And I moved from Spreckels here. So I've been here seventeen years. Seventeen, too long. I can't stand it. (Chuckles)

KT: So then in terms of the physical city, how you have seen it change, tell me how that seems to you. From the beginning, first it seemed to be kind of a country town.

LM: Well, for instance, Ala Moana [Shopping Center] wasn't there at all. But soon after I got here. I don't know if it was even a year. My husband and I went to Kailua.

KT: Hau'ula?

LM: Kailua.

KT: Oh, Kailua.

LM: And we went to the beach. We had no car. We were walking to the bus and everything. And we were on the beach, and we saw all these terrible waves coming in, [atmosphere changed turned dark]. And I got scared because I am a cream puff. And I told him, I said, "Come on, let's go." This is on a Saturday. Well, we didn't realize that was a tidal wave, a horrible one. It was the tidal wave. And I said, "Come on, let's go," because we lived in CHA3 then, so we had to come all the way from Kailua, to go all the way out there. And it was finally in the paper that we discovered it was the tidal wave.

KT: And they did not have a warning system?

LM: There wasn't any at all. [LM was not aware of a warning system.]

KT: Were there other people on the beach?

LM: Yes, but they were starting to leave. You know they could feel something. And we walked to town [Kailua] from the beach now, and then caught the bus. And we didn't know until after, that it was the beginning of the tidal wave.

KT: And when you say . . .

LM: That was the one in '46, I believe, yes. Mm hmm.

KT: And did it come to this island or it got to the Big Island on that particular morning?

LM: It come to this island, too, but it was worst in Kailua. And then I saw the one, the last one in front of Ala Moana Beach, you know? Oh, well. . . . See, the people are stupid here. Instead of going away from it, they walk to it. And . . .

KT: What, the water goes out?

LM: No, it comes in, see.

KT: But describe exactly what it . . .

LM: Well, it goes out like this (LM points out) and [then] comes in.

KT: I see.

LM: And the people here walked down to watch it. In fact, we were, Teresa [Portis Gray] and I were up at Ala Moana that day. And everybody, of course, she would have stood there, too, and I told her, "Come on. Let's get away from here." So we come on home. Because people were standing in front of the shopping center, you know, up on that upper part there. But that was too close for me.

KT: Did they announce it?

LM: They had bullhorns and everything because it was a. . . . What is she, a writer, she wrote for the paper, and she was in a plane going over. I don't know how she did this. Anyway, she was killed that day.

KT: Who?

LM: I forget her name.

KT: Oh.

LM: She was a reporter. And, the girl that I worked with in the shipyard was a reporter, Doris Obata. They were very good friends, so that's why I knew she got killed.

KT: And that was---what year was that?

LM: That was. . . . You see, Ala Moana Center was built, [in] '59, excuse me.

KT: [Nineteen] fifty-nine.

LM: And it was soon after that, around that time. Mm hmm.

KT: And again, there was a bullhorn and some people decided they wanted to go and . . .

LM: Look, yes.

KT: And were some people killed?

LM: Well, I don't remember. And it scared me, so I got away from there. So.

KT: Well, let's see. Any other kinds of observations in terms of families, or in terms of maybe Hawaiian people that you got to know, any kind of reactions to people here in the community. Your reactions and observations.

LM: Well, I worked with a girl, she was Japanese. And it's the only time in my life, she resented me to no end. And I never understood why. I've never found out. She finally quit. Most of my contacts were with people that I had met in the shipyard. Just like I told you, I correspond with some of them now.

KT: What did you do in the shipyard?

LM: Secretary. I had one neighbor that lived behind me. She was Haole. And she and her husband, they moved to Renton, Washington. But they come here about every other year, and we all get together. And there's a certain few of us that all get together. I have one good friend here, she retired when I did. She may be a couple years younger than I, and she went into ballroom dancing. And she travels all over, you know, for exhibitions and so forth. I think it's wonderful. And her partner, at one time, was a young local fellow, I think they do it for the Fred Astaire [Dance Studio]. I'm not sure. And, so you can see how many, many years we've been friends, just many years.

Then, I have a Dutch friend. She calls me every day of my life. And she's got two girls. As long as they (have known) me, they still call me Mrs. Maloney. So, I had the other--oh yes, it never really got dull or boring. I just don't like it here.

KT: What was that?

LM: I just don't like it here.

KT: But you've been here for how many years?

LM: I don't care. I don't like it. I can't stand it.

KT: Because it's culturally different?

LM: No.

KT: What is it you don't like?

LM: I prefer a big city. I like theaters and things like that to do, see. Gosh, when they come here. . . . I don't get too much. . . .

I went to see Cats, but I didn't enjoy it as much as I thought I should. But it was because of my seat, for one thing. And so that's the things that I miss.

KT: Why did you stay all this time?

LM: Well, I guess security is one thing. Although I got a transfer to Oakland one year, and it was something unheard of. They called me on my phone in my office. That's unheard of because usually they call, you know, the supervisor. And I got the transfer, but I got sick. And I had to go in the hospital. I had vascular reconstruction. So that's why I didn't go. That was my one time to go. And another time I was trying to go to Yugoslavia and everybody talked me out of it. Because of the Communists, you know. So, I have no family, so you see, the only place I know to go is Detroit. However, I have a friend up in California. She called me up three times last week to see if I would come there and live. I'm a little hesitant about that.

KT: But you have your friends and everything here now?

LM: Yes, uh huh. I have a lot of friends in L.A., but not in San Diego. I have one Haole friend there that I met here. And that's all I know except this other friend, you see. I'm a little hesitant. But Teresa [Portis Gray], you know, who I've raised, she wants me to move to the Mainland. But she wants me to move to California, but she lives in Chicago.

KT: Now how did you raise her? I don't remember what we said about that.

LM: Where did I meet her? Oh, I met her dad through a friend of mine. And then he wanted me to see this little girl. She was a little tiny thing. So then, I took--you know, she took to me and I took to her--and she used to come to my house for the weekend. She was in a foster home. And . . .

KT: This was in Hawai'i?

LM: Yeah. She's part Portuguese. She's Portuguese and Black. So, she was born here. So, she used to come to my house weekends and then sometimes I'd buy her clothes and they'd take 'em away from her. And I'd tell her, "I do not work hard for them to do that." And she'd go back and tell them word for word what I said. So anyway, she ran away during the holidays, come straight to my house. I had houseguests and I let her stay until the holidays was over. And I made her go back.

KT: How old was she?

LM: She was nine then. So then, I told her dad after that, in February. I said, "You know, Teresa's going to run away again."

He says, "Oh, no." So, she did. But she went to his house that time, and he worked at night, he didn't get home till two or three in the morning, she's sitting on the steps. So he called me right away, at two o'clock in the morning. "What shall I do?"

I said, "Bring her here." And that's the way that happened. She stayed with me till she was nineteen. And when she was nineteen, then she decided, well, waltz a while with me. Of course, her dad was spoiling her so she went to him. Then, she got married. That didn't work out. So then she went to Chicago.

But she sure has turned out to be a real, real nice person because she called me one day to check on her dad and I was sick, but I took a cab over there. And she had talked to him and she didn't know whether he had been drinking that night or what, and when I talked to him that night, I didn't know either. So I told her, I'd have to wait till the next morning, but I'd go over as early as possible. So when I went over, his whole foot, these toes were black as tar. I didn't know what it was. I thought somebody had painted some kind of medicine on it. Isn't that stupid? So, I called the doctor. And the nurse said she couldn't give me an appointment until two o'clock. And I said, well, I'll bring him in. So I called a cab at that time, and he couldn't walk. So the man next door to him, a little Korean man, he took him piggyback to the cab. So then, I called her. They told me when I got him in the hospital he had gangrene and the leg had to come off.

So I called Teresa in Chicago. She had called me and I called her at work. That was on a Monday. And on Wednesday she was here. And she stayed five weeks. And she put him in a care home. She went back to Chicago. It was last year. She come back the first of July, picked up her father and took him back to Chicago. And he's been, to me, quite a burden on her, because she does everything she can. She's got him in a care home now, and she just fights with the nurses and the doctors because recently he had an ulcer on the good toe. Excuse me. Then she called me and said they were going to perform surgery to see if they could save that toe and promote the circulation. They did, but it hasn't done any good, so I don't know. She talked to me last week, but I mean, she sacrificed her marriage and everything for her father, and I think it's wonderful. And she's just as nice to me. She called me up last week from the care home so I could talk to her (dad) there. And between the two of them, they're always sending me---I get (fruit) of the month now. And she sends this Cosmopolitan, Essence. So she's a real---she's forty years old now. Can you imagine that?

KT: It's wonderful.

LM: She's forty years old, but she's tiny.

KT: And she doesn't miss the islands?

LM: Yes, you wouldn't believe it, Kay, when she comes here. She looks

like she's moving. She's got Chinese seeds. She has Portuguese sausage. She goes to Dee Lite [Bakery] and gets two of the cakes. And, oh, since she went back, she come Thanksgiving to see me. And then, when she went back, I sent her for her birthday kūlolo, that's Filipino food, and bibingka or something like that. I had sent that to her. And the taro chips and the Diamond macadamia nut cookies. She misses it here. She does.

KT: But her life is there now?

LM: Yes.

KT: Does she pull with a Black community or a mixed community or a White community or a local? Do they have a local Hawaiian community over there or. . . .

LM: No. Her best girlfriend is Mexican. And I went to her wedding. I met her. And she had---but they were all of his friends, see. I don't believe she has a whole lot of friends. She's a kinda--she has funny ways. She won't look at anything on TV but Channel 11 [educational television]. She thinks the rest of it's junk. And she went to see Alvin Ailey, she told me, couple weeks ago. And I said, "How did you like it? Wasn't it grand?" She said it was good, but she likes the other kind of ballet. That was too modern for her, I guess. I said, "Well." (Chuckles)

KT: So this is your stepdaughter, in a sense?

LM: Yeah.

KT: Your hānai daughter.

LM: Yeah, she's really turned out well. She had a little trouble there at first, you know. She had so many jobs here it wasn't funny. Then she ended up with Alexander & Baldwin. But she always worked two jobs. She went from Alexander & Baldwin (after work) out to International Market and worked as cashier at Cock of the Roost. And she worked like that all the time, two jobs.

KT: And you always have had the one steady job. You never get any extra jobs, that was fine.

LM: Just when I retired, as I said. I worked up (at) the university [University of Hawai'i at Mānoa] in the entomology [department], and then I worked for Dr. (Patricia) Steinhoff, I think her name. She was writing a book on abortion. And then I worked for OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration].

KT: Who?

LM: OSHA? Occupational Safety? Yes. But I didn't want to work for them. It was just by accident.

KT: Did you like working at the university?

LM: Loved it. Just loved it. And everyone was so lovely. And there was one Dr. Smith. Do you remember him? He was the one that kept a monkey at home. He died, I read. But he had a monkey for a pet. But I just loved working there. Everybody was so nice. I was the only one in the office, and when I went out to lunch, I had to lock up the office. So, I had no one around. Let's see. Mitchell [Wallace C. Mitchell] was the head of entomology. But those men were around all the time. Because I saw one of the fellows' pictures in the paper the other day about the cockroaches. Yeah.

KT: Was [Ernest] Harris up there at that point in entomology, or not, when you were there?

LM: Yes. Yes, uh huh. I didn't know him, but he was there. Mm hmm.

KT: Well, can you think of any other thing that you'd like to include in this little history that we're sharing, this genealogy?

LM: Well, of course, you know all about the Wai Wai Nui club.

KT: Well, let's hear a little bit about the Wai Wai Nui club.

LM: It's been organized for twenty-eight years.

KT: Why was it organized?

LM: Marva Garrett and Winnie [Carter], what was her (maiden) name. I can't remember. Anyway, they thought about it. But they still wanted the club on, say, the order of the NAACP. And then some of the women, they wanted kind of a social club. So Marva drew out, and then she got involved in the NAACP. So it was just a case of a few women here organizing a club. And then, we were always trying to---like we bought easels for (the) Waimano Home [Waimano Training School and Hospital], you know. And we'd buy things to put in Tripler [Army Hospital] for the little kids, like pencils and crayons, and things. And we'd put pictures of well-known Black people, men mostly, in the libraries, in the state library. And so, nearly everything these clubs are doing today . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

LM: And then, since 1968, I think it is, Wai Wai Nui has given a scholarship every year. And this year, we gave (two) $300 scholarship. Some of these Black children are certainly smart, aren't they?

KT: Definitely.

LM: Oh, I tell you it's amazing. Different when, you know. . . . But, I did have a local girl. She was young. She invited me to a luau. And then I went to a Filipino luau, I think it was. And where they did all the Filipino dances, you know. But I had one local girl to tell me that the local people were the only, I mean the Mainland people were the only people that worried about how they would eat and sleep, and they had money. The local people didn't care. They could go on the beach and be perfectly satisfied. This young girl told me that one day. But, you see we didn't know any better. (Chuckles) I . . .

KT: So Wai Wai Nui began twenty-eight years ago. Would you call it a cultural or an ethnic club? How would you describe it? Were there any non-Black women involved?

LM: No, no.

KT: So that was kind of a cultural . . .

LM: Yes.

KT: . . . ethnic . . .

LM: Uh huh.

KT: . . . grouping of people.

LM: And we gave---well, for instance, we gave the first fashion show. And we had it at the Princess Ka'iulani [Hotel] and all the help come out to watch it, see. And the residents here and the young people, they would make their own clothes and use their own clothes for our fashion shows. We didn't go to any of the stores. And one year, I imagined she has. . . . The first year we gave the fashion show, we were raising money for Donnis Thompson [Director of Women's Athletics at the University of Hawai'i from 1961 to 1982] to take her group--was it [to] New Jersey--to try out for the Olympics. And the money we raised in that little fashion show we gave to her. See, because what we charge for our fashion shows and everything, we never thought of twenty-five dollars then. I guess the people would have blown us away. And it's been very interesting with the Wai Wai Nui, you know. And, so many things and they really have not kept too good records of it. Because the turnover. . . . See, there's only, well, Addie [Lewis] is a charter (member)--Bertha [Dunson], Dorothy [Preddy] and myself, were in it when it was organized, which was 1960. Addie come in later, but it was at that time that we had just got our charter. Mm hmm.

KT: So you've watched it grow and develop a lot in those twenty-eight years, huh?

LM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. So they should be very (proud)---because we're the oldest Black women's club here. The oldest.

KT: Are they the ones that sponsor the beauty, Black beauty, Miss Black . . .

LM: No, that's. . . . Well, we do sponsor, in the sum of $300 this year. But that's put on by the Lewis', you know. They have the franchise.

KT: Oh, I didn't know that. So it's his own business then?

LM: Well, I guess you could call it that, but they put it on every year.

KT: Oh, I didn't know that.

LM: And they have to get the franchise. Excuse me. Because the finals are usually done in the Mainland. And whoever comes (out) first here, they have to take them to the Mainland. (The winner did go to the Mainland.) But it's been going on for ten years, you know. And you run out of teenagers. (Chuckles)

KT: There always are more.

LM: Yeah, uh huh. And I don't think they confine it to Black, part-Black, anyway. Because I don't see how you can over here, do you?

KT: It's hard.

LM: Yes, I don't buy that. Mm hmm. Because the girl that--the Links [social club] the other night gave, one of the girls that they gave the scholarship, and the one that we gave the scholarship, her mother's Haole. See, so it's almost impossible.

KT: Well, I think we'll wrap it up here.

LM: Okay.

KT: Thank you very much.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

KT: Okay, one last word. Go ahead and kind of just talk into there and tell me about those dances that you were saying.

LM: Oh.

KT: The NAACP and the canteen.

LM: Yes, 1947, '48, some members of the NAACP would have dances down at the pier. And, it would be a very mixed group with Haole women. Also, there was a canteen across from the Richards Street post office where every Sunday they would bring in the people, (along with the servicemen). I've been to the canteen. And there a whole lot of people. And particularly, Japanese. The canteen was

actually run by Japanese who later all become union men.

KT: I see. It was a union kind of a thing.

LM: Yes.

KT: And then the union leaned to the left?

LM: Sort of then. Yes.

KT: Uh huh. Uh huh. Oh, I find that interesting. Okay, we'll call it a day.

END OF INTERVIEW

Oral Histories of African Americans

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

December 1990